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Hidden Government **by Sheldon Richman**

Americans pride themselves on “self-government.” But when significant policies are undertaken without their notice, much less consent, self-government is a cruel hoax.

Reporting by Seymour Hersh of *The New Yorker* and other sources indicate that the Bush administration actively helped the Israeli government plan an attack on Lebanon. When it was launched, with U.S. approval, after Hezbollah guerillas seized two Israeli soldiers in July, the attack killed about 800 people, mostly civilians, and left much of Lebanon in rubble. Israel’s goal was to destroy Hezbollah, an organization formed to resist Israel’s illegal and brutal 18-year occupation of Lebanon that began in 1982 and formally ended in 2000. Israel pursued its goal on two tracks. It attacked Hezbollah directly and it fiercely bombarded Lebanese society in an effort to persuade the people there to reject Hezbollah’s presence. Neither strategy worked. But Lebanon’s effort to rebuild itself was set back many years, as Israel intended.

Hezbollah was always more than a guerilla organization aimed at the Israeli occupation. It has provided social services to the poor southern Lebanese and is a political party that elected members of Parliament in last year’s elections. Hezbollah members hold two cabinet posts.

President Bush’s motive in helping Israel apparently stemmed from his belief that, as Hersh reported, “the relationship between Hezbollah and its supporters in Iran and Syria [is] one of the ‘root causes of instability’ [Bush’s words]” in the Middle East. In the Bush/neoconservative worldview, Israel’s occupation of Arab lands, dating back at least 40 years, and its bullying of Lebanon for 30 years play no part in the region’s problems. From such willful blindness disasters come. And while disaster was befalling Lebanon — its infrastructure demolished and its people killed, maimed, and dispossessed — President Bush and his disgraceful secretary of state blocked all movement toward a cease-fire.

Hersh writes: “The Bush Administration ... was closely involved in the planning of Israel’s retaliatory attacks. President Bush and Vice-President Dick Cheney were convinced, current and former intelligence and diplomatic officials told me, that a successful Israeli Air Force bombing campaign against Hezbollah’s heavily fortified underground-missile and

command-and-control complexes in Lebanon could ease Israel's security concerns and also serve as a prelude to a potential American preemptive attack to destroy Iran's nuclear installations, some of which are also buried deep underground." The Bush administration has denied Hersh's account, but reports from Israel's *Jerusalem Post* say that the administration tried to get Israel to attack Syria as well as Lebanon.

This doesn't mean that Israel attacked Lebanon because the Bush administration told it to do so. The two governments have a harmony of interests, although some differences too. The Bush administration appeared to become uncomfortable as civilian casualties mounted and the Lebanese infrastructure was demolished. But what is significant is that the U.S. government was apparently an active partner in the planning. As Hersh reports, Israel had long planned to attack Hezbollah and the U.S. government knew it would happen sooner or later. The administration saw benefits for its own designs on the Middle East, including Iran.

Were the American people informed that "their" government was playing this role? Were they asked for their consent? Would they have approved? That the questions sound absurd demonstrates how far removed government is from the people who are supposedly sovereign in the American system. I don't recall the 2004 presidential candidates debating whether the government should have the power to help other governments, funded and armed by American taxpayers, make war against civilian populations. Where did President Bush find this blank check?

Do the American people have any idea what is being done in their name? Are they aware that wars in Iraq and Lebanon appear to be preludes to a war in Iran? Can anyone keep a straight face while calling this self-government?

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